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ABSTRACT

Noting that prevention is the key to healthy development of the youngest children in Illinois, the Birth to Three Project is working to develop a comprehensive, coordinated system of services for expecting families and children under 3 years of age. This progress report details the first year implementation of the All Our Kids (AOK): Birth to Three Networks program in 10 Illinois communities. Local public health departments serve as the home for the AOK network in each community. Through the networks, participants identify barriers and gaps in services and share that information with the state-level Birth to Three Project, creating a two-way communication mechanism between communities and state-level stakeholders. Data were collected for this report through interviews with a variety of individuals involved in the networks during the first year of operation. The report details accomplishments related to each of the project's five goals: (1) fostering broad-based community support; (2) informing families about what is available; (3) making sure services are available; (4) making it easier for families to use services; and (5) ensuring that families have a say. The report notes that as the networks develop, new partners are being brought into the discussion, including employers, the faith community, and law enforcement. Many of the networks disseminated resource information about early childhood services to families and providers through printed resource materials, media presentations, and community events. Networks are identifying local service needs and increasing the number of developmental screenings conducted. Efforts have also been made to coordinate care and reduce service duplication, to ease transitions for families, to ensure appropriate referrals, and to offer cross-agency trainings. Family members are actively involved in the planning, delivery, and evaluation of services. (KB)

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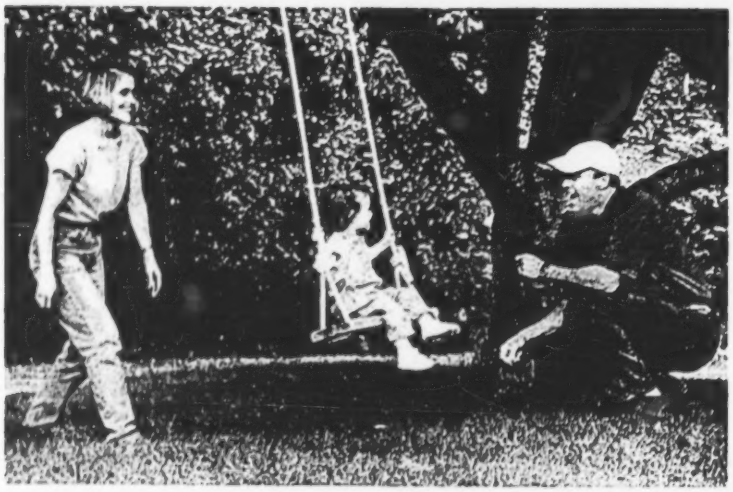
Maximizing Resources: Helping Families Receive The Best Start in Life



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All Our Kids: Birth to Three Network

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A Progress Report
May 2002

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For more information about the Birth to Three Project and the All our Kids: Birth to Three Networks, please contact the Ounce of Prevention Fund at (312) 922-3863 or visit www.ounceofprevention.org.

Introduction: An Impressive Start

One of a baby's first lessons takes place when she smiles and produces a responsive smile from a loving parent or caregiver. With this seemingly simple interaction, the baby begins to generalize important lessons about the bigger world – she begins to build a foundation for intellectual, social and emotional growth that prepares her for school and life. Several long-term studies now show the dire consequences if this stable foundation is not built – if a young child is not made to feel more safe and less vulnerable, if her curiosity, love and desire to learn are not reciprocated.

Communities throughout Illinois face a host of problems that threaten the healthy intellectual, physical, and emotional development of their children. These problems are interrelated at a variety of levels and in complex ways.

When problems are interrelated, solutions must be as well. Services that help families must be integrated and multi-dimensional – they must be coordinated to address many problems at once rather than one problem at a time. Unfortunately, in Illinois today, the services families receive are often fragmented, one-dimensional and sporadic.

The All Our Kids: Birth to Three Networks are maximizing resources and ensuring that children receive the best possible start in life.

The Ounce of Prevention Fund and the Illinois Department of Human Services have taken an innovative approach to developing a community-based system of care for young children and their families. The All Our Kids (AOK): Birth to Three Networks is an effort to create a high-quality, well-coordinated, easily accessible system of local services that promotes the optimal growth and development of all Illinois children under age three. The All Our Kids: Birth to Three Networks have been operating in ten Illinois communities for one year, building a foundation for future success.

The All Our Kids: Birth to Three Networks are focused on better serving families by changing the way services are designed and delivered. The networks are not charged with developing new services or programs. In short, the networks are designed to maximize state and local resources while ensuring that families get what they need to receive the best possible start in life.

This report illustrates the early accomplishments and initial successes of the All Our Kids: Birth to Three Networks. The challenge now is to build upon these successes by continuing the hard work of moving toward the networks' goals and ensuring that more Illinois communities have the opportunity to embark on these collaborative approaches.

Overview: An Innovative Effort

The Ounce of Prevention Fund approached government agencies in the fall of 1998 to begin planning for the Birth to Three Project, a statewide, multi-year, multidisciplinary effort funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The Birth to Three Project – aimed at developing a comprehensive, coordinated, high-quality system of birth to three services throughout Illinois – is addressing key areas: social and emotional health, best program practices and outcomes, systems coordination, training and workforce development, and linkages to health care.

The All Our Kids: Birth to Three Networks are not charged with developing new services or programs. Instead, the networks seek to build a system of prevention services that maximizes the use of existing resources.

Historically, services for families have been offered in fragmented, categorical and uncoordinated ways. In fact, in Illinois there are 37 federal and state programs and initiatives for expecting parents, infants and toddlers. These are administered by 8 different government agencies, and operated locally by thousands of community-based agencies and school districts throughout the state. Various programs working with many of the same families continue to have different standards, rules, regulations and procedures – all of which is confusing and frustrating for families. Lack of awareness of programs and services also makes it difficult for families to find the program that is most appropriate to meet their needs.

During the planning process for the Birth to Three Project, families and communities highlighted that too many Illinois families with young children either do not know about services available in their community or cannot find anyone to provide the particular service they need. The Illinois Department of Human Services provided funding, primarily from the Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant, to pilot All Our Kids: Birth to Three Networks in ten Illinois communities to address these and other needs at the local level.

A relatively young initiative, the AOK: Birth to Three Networks were created in January 2001 following a year of needs assessment and strategic planning in each community. Local public health departments, which play a key community leadership role in assessing and addressing the broad-based needs of community members, serve as the home for the AOK: Birth to Three Network in each community. The ten networks are located in:

- Adams County
- Cicero (Cook County)
- Kane County
- Macon County
- McLean County
- North Lawndale (Chicago)
- Stephenson County
- Tazewell County
- Vermilion County
- Wabash County

Through the networks, participants identify barriers and gaps in services and share that information with the state-level Birth to Three Project, creating a two-way communication mechanism between communities and state-level stakeholders. The networks also provide an opportunity to launch successful and innovative models of service delivery that may prove applicable for statewide replication.

The All Our Kids: Birth to Three Networks include parents, providers and others who serve very young children. Each network community is creating, building and sustaining a coordinated system of services to ensure that all expecting families and those with children under three have the opportunity to receive a variety of high-quality services – everything from prenatal care, well-baby check-ups and parenting education to specialized services.

This report summarizes interview responses from a variety of individuals involved in the networks during the first year of actual operation. Examined together, these accomplishments show that the All Our Kids: Birth to Three Networks are off to an impressive start.

Highlights: From Steps to Strides in the First Year

The All Our Kids: Birth to Three Networks have made significant strides and achieved a number of accomplishments throughout Illinois – and yet there is a long way to go to reach our established goals. Through an ongoing process of community assessment, strategic planning, implementation and evaluation, each network community is working to achieve five basic goals, which provide a framework to review the progress made thus far.

5 Network Goals

- **Fostering broad-based community support:**
  Actively involving and engaging a *broad range of stakeholders* in the work of the local birth to three network

- **Informing families about what is available:**
  Increasing families' *access* to needed and appropriate birth to three services

- **Making sure services are available:**
  Increasing the *capacity* of the local birth to three service system

- **Making it easier for families to use services:**
  Increasing *coordination and collaboration* among service providers and families to improve the efficiency of the birth to three service system

- **Ensuring that families have a say:**
  Increasing *family satisfaction* with the system of services for expecting families and children under three

Fostering broad-based community support:
Actively involving and engaging a broad range of stakeholders in the work of the local birth to three network

Network communities have fostered broad-based participation by developing agendas with diverse appeal and utility. Information sharing, collaborative action steps and policy recommendations are all the result of the inclusive process that defines the AOK: Birth to Three Networks. As the networks further develop, new partners are being brought to the table, such as employers, the faith community, law enforcement and institutions of higher education.

Mobilizing partnerships

- In the North Lawndale community in Chicago, **new providers continue to join the Network**, strengthening already outstanding attendance. A vital sense of community is prominent during monthly meetings that represent a place where open dialogue and linkages between providers are nurtured. Unique to this community is a partnership between the Network and Sinai Community Institute, the area's largest health care provider.

- The Vermilion County Network has established a powerful partnership with the **local Chamber of Commerce**. As a result, the Chamber printed a regular column on birth to five issues in its quarterly newsletter and has supported the Network by displaying a birth to five educational booth at its annual fair.

- Several network communities have strengthened linkages between health care and other services for young children by sharing information about programs and local resources with **physicians and their staff**. This exchange increases awareness and utilization of available services.

- **Partnerships with parents** have also been key to the networks' progress to date. As part of their ongoing community assessment, all networks seek parent input through extensive surveys and other strategies. Additionally, Stephenson County hired a parent liaison who reaches out to parents in the community and facilitates a parent group. In the town of Cicero (Cook County), the Network has worked with family day care providers to develop specific strategies to reach Spanish-speaking parents in the community.

Informing families about what is available:
Increasing families' access to needed and appropriate birth to three services

The first step in increasing access to services is making sure families know what is available in their own community. Through public education efforts and information sharing opportunities, the All Our Kids: Birth to Three Networks have improved families' access to information and services.

Providing resource materials to families

As one method of improving awareness and access to services, many of the networks published and disseminated resource information about early childhood services to families and providers. The materials have included everything from directories to brochures to web sites.

- Tazewell County is on the second printing of their **Family Yellow Pages**. To date, the Network has issued over 4,000 copies of this directory of the county's birth to three services. The Family Yellow Pages are provided to families with young children to help them learn about available services and to local medical staff to give them accurate information and facilitate appropriate referrals to community resources.

- Vermilion County distributed 3,000 **pocket-sized Parent Resource Guides** of key services in the county. The Resource Guides were distributed to agencies, libraries, physicians' offices and other community locations to ensure that information on local birth to five resources is available.

- In an effort to make service information available in a variety of formats, Adams County developed a **web site** to identify local services and provide general birth to three information to the public. The Adams County Network also produced 5,000 copies of a local Exchange Club Parent Guide and Resource Directory that was distributed to medical providers and social service agencies.

- Similarly, the Macon County Network developed a **Family Yellow Pages** listing community services for children under five, which has been distributed to families through key service providers. This directory will also be posted on the Macon County Health Department's web site.

- The Network in Cicero distributed a birth to three community resource directory to service providers and developed a one-page **bilingual listing** of essential local services designed for parents.

- In order to increase awareness and utilization of developmental screening resources, the Kane County Network partnered with the IDHS Child Care Nurse Consultant to distribute information about developmental screenings through **one-on-one visits** with child care providers throughout the county.

- In partnership with the Tracey Foundation, Adams County created **bookmarks** containing information about topics such as parenting and fostering male involvement in the family.

- Stephenson County collaborated with a variety of community partners to publish and distribute the book ***Birth and Baby Basics*** to parents as a resource on important issues during the early years.

- Wabash County reached out to young children and families by supplying birth to three information in public places (i.e. **restaurant tray liners, grocery store flyers,** newspaper articles and local events targeting families).

- In order to reach parents in a variety of different and accessible locations, Vermilion County posted birth to five information on **emergency room and local employer lunchroom bulletin boards**.

Educating families through the media

- Members of the Stephenson County Network participated as **key speakers** on a local radio program highlighting the importance of early childhood development and preventing child abuse.

- The networks in both Adams County and Vermilion County disseminated important birth to three information during a **radio show** that covered topics that parents identified in the networks' initial community assessments. Topics included: "The Illinois Early Intervention System" and "Child Care: More than Babysitting."

- The Macon County Network published developmental screening information and distributed a **calendar of developmental screening events** to local media, providers, and families. Since then, local media have contacted the Network periodically for additional information and updates. In addition, the Network distributed Halloween tray liners highlighting birth to three issues to local restaurants serving families with very young children.

- In order to educate and reach a broad audience, the Kane County Network collaborated with the *Kane County Chronicle* in February 2001 on a **six-part newspaper series** featuring birth to three issues.

Reaching families through community events

- The McLean County Network participated in a local **Family Fun Day** and provided growth charts and information on the Network, child development, and child safety. In addition, 100 people attended a community forum that showcased birth to three issues sponsored by the McLean County Network and others.

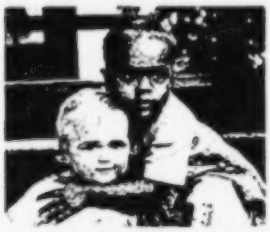
- In an effort to increase awareness of community resources and developmental screening opportunities, the Cicero Network's Health Advocate **met with Spanish-speaking family child care providers** to inform them about network efforts and provide them with a Spanish language public education outreach packet to share with parents.

- The Network in North Lawndale organized and hosted a **week-long Community-Wide Agency Forum** which informed residents of local resources and provided an opportunity to create linkages between service providers.

- As part of a larger public education campaign developed to increase awareness around four child and family issues, the Tazewell County Network used print, radio and TV media strategies to share information about child care, dental care, child development, screenings, and behavior/discipline. Their work culminated in a **child care forum** attended by over 70 interested providers and families. A majority of the network members contributed financial support to the larger public education campaign. In order to more broadly publicize information on developmental screenings and local area resources, the Tazewell County Network published an article in the *Pekin Daily Times*.

- The Network in Wabash County participated in the **County Literacy Fair** which attracted 1,000 people from the local area and provided an opportunity to distribute information and resources pertaining to children under three.

Making sure services are available:
Increasing the capacity of the local birth to three service system



Network communities have begun to tackle gaps in services identified through their needs assessment and strategic planning processes. They are working to address unmet needs and ensure that adequate and appropriate services for expecting families and children under age three are available throughout each network community.

Identifying local service needs

- As a result of its partnership with the Suicide and Depression Task Force of Kane County, the Network in Kane County identified a lack of mental health services for pregnant women and those with very young children. Hence, the Task Force is formulating **a comprehensive county plan to address mental health service needs** for pregnant women and children under three.

- In the town of Cicero, Network members responded to the need expressed by local pediatricians and other community providers for additional **parent education** services in that community. The Network partnered with a local area pediatrician to offer a parenting series for Spanish-speaking families and hired a Health Advocate to work in particular with the Latino community.

- In response to provider input regarding the lack of **training opportunities for child care staff** in this rural community, the Wabash County Network co-sponsored a child care conference that offered training and resources for staff in the area.

- As a result of information obtained from the networks' parent assessments and surveys:
  - The health department in Adams County **altered its operating hours** to accommodate working parents' need for more flexible scheduling for child immunizations.
  - Tazewell and Kane Counties identified **dental services** as a missing component in the continuum of local services for children under three, and both networks are developing strategies to address this gap in services.
  - Wabash County started a **breastfeeding support group**.

- To assess community capacity and the availability of birth to three services, Macon, Stephenson and McLean Counties completed **comprehensive "community maps"** which indicate the types of services provided by each network member and birth to three provider. The community mapping exercise strengthened provider involvement in the networks and serves as a tool to inventory existing resources, identify service gaps and needs, and highlight possible areas of service duplication on an ongoing basis.

Increasing Developmental Screenings

In an effort to increase the capacity of the local birth to three system to identify children under three who might be experiencing developmental delays, networks have undertaken the following activities:

- In the town of Cicero, the Network partnered with School District 99 on its **annual screening day**, and 125 children under three years of age received developmental screenings. Sixty-six infants and toddlers also received lead screenings. As a result of the success of this partnership, five additional screening days will be co-sponsored by School District 99 and the Network during the current school year.

- The Adams County Network partnered with local school districts, the Early Childhood and Family Center, and the area Child and Family Connections agency to conduct the **first open day of developmental screenings for children under age three**. As a result, 25 young children received a developmental screening.

- As a means of ensuring that every child in Stephenson County is receiving timely and routine developmental screenings, a county-wide reminder system has been developed. **Families now receive mailed reminders** to inform them when their child is due for a screening and where in the community they can access this service.

- Members of the Cicero Network have partnered with **pediatric health providers** to increase the availability of developmental screenings for children under age three and to increase the earlier identification of those who might be at risk for developmental delays. One such partnership involves a local Early Intervention agency which provides developmental screenings on a weekly basis in the office of a local pediatrician.

- The Stephenson County Network increased the local screening capacity by sending a community provider for additional training to become a master trainer on the Denver II Developmental Screening Test. This trainer is now able to **train in-home child care providers** to use the screening tool, thereby increasing the number of young children being screened in a natural setting.

- The community of North Lawndale also increased **its capacity for offering developmental screenings** by training local providers on the use of the Ages and Stages Questionnaires developmental screening tool.

- To increase the pool of trained personnel available to offer developmental screenings, Kane County trained twelve child care providers on the Ages and Stages Questionnaires. These **new screeners are now credentialled** and able to expand the number of screenings conducted in the county.

- As a result of increased screenings, eight of the ten network communities exceed the statewide average for the number of children under three who are referred to the Early Intervention system. **Earlier identification and referral of children with potential developmental delays** ensures that these children receive intervention and treatment earlier to address and prevent further delays.

Making it easier for families to use services:
Increasing coordination and collaboration among service providers and families to improve the efficiency of the birth to three service system

Network members have worked together to maximize local prevention and intervention resources. To this end, network members have collaborated to ensure appropriate referrals and transitions for the birth to three population and their families, reduce duplication of services, promote cross agency staff training, encourage the use of common referral forms, and coordinate case management strategies. In addition, they have developed partnerships and coordinated efforts to identify pregnant women, support new mothers, and screen at-risk infants and toddlers who might be in need of specialized services and resources.

Coordinating care and reducing duplication of services

- To streamline case assignments and decrease duplication of home visiting services, the Kane County Network is collaborating with the KaneKares program at the health department to **coordinate nine home visiting programs** serving the county. This collaboration maximizes local resources by reducing duplication, reaching more families who could benefit from services, and linking families to the most appropriate home visiting program to meet their needs.

- Stephenson County has developed a system that utilizes joint staffings and a **web-based program to coordinate services for families involved with multiple providers**. The electronic ENCOMPASS system has the broad-based support of many providers in the community and helps coordinate case management plans and facilitate follow-up on referrals.

- In the town of Cicero, local birth to three providers developed a **common release of information form** that was utilized during the school district's developmental screening day. As a result of this common consent form, parents only had to complete one form for both the developmental and lead screenings and providers (e.g., school district, network, screening agency, health department, and private physicians) were able to share information.

- In the North Lawndale community in Chicago, the Network initiated a partnership with Sinai Hospital to pilot a **Post-Partum Delivery Project**. This coordinated discharge planning project identifies all new births delivered at Sinai Hospital and immediately connects interested new moms and their babies to the appropriate community-based Family Case Management services.

- In Kane County, under the auspices of the KidCare Application Agent Alliance, follow-up phone calls are being conducted on KidCare applicants who are denied eligibility for health insurance. Through coordinated efforts, the Alliance is collecting common data, **streamlining the application process**, and creating standard follow-up procedures to ensure that services are provided.

- A number of networks have created community asset maps that indicate the types of services provided by each network member and birth to three provider. This inventory of existing resources and assessment of community capacity serves as a tool to identify service gaps and needs and **highlight possible service duplication areas on an ongoing basis**.

Easing Transitions for Families

- To identify pregnant women and provide them with information about programs for young children during their pregnancies, the Vermilion County Network **partnered with area OB/GYN providers** to facilitate the sharing of information on community resources for families with very young children. In addition, Macon County **has partnered with the local Baby Talk program** to provide information about local services and parenting resources to new mothers.

- Kane County's Perinatal Committee is establishing a system to help families complete **KidCare applications** for health insurance coverage for all financially qualified pregnant women. This allows a case number to be assigned quickly upon the child's birth with minimal paperwork for Kane County's perinatal committee

- As a means of helping new parents be aware of and secure needed services, the Kane County Network **partnered with the County Clerk** to include an introductory letter from the Network to all parents who request birth certificates for their newborn babies. The letter provides local resource information for parents with young children.

Ensuring appropriate referrals

- To better link the public and private health care sectors, five networks have **expanded physicians' knowledge** of community resources and improved the appropriateness of referrals to non-medical services, such as parenting classes or counseling through individual meetings with and presentations to physicians.

- To ensure that families with multiple needs are receiving appropriate services in a coordinated manner, Vermilion County created a **special committee that meets regularly to discuss service plans** for families receiving services from multiple agencies. Through this coordinated work, agencies are less likely to provide duplicate services to families and families are more likely to receive the appropriate and comprehensive services they need. The committee has also been able to identify systems barriers that may be interfering with the maximum coordination of services.

- Kane County established a referral follow-up system in the **Mother/Baby Units of area hospitals** to identify pregnant women and newborns and ensure they receive the services they need. Furthermore, to provide consistent and timely follow-up for newborns who fail a second hearing test, all cases are now **referred to the same contact person** within the Family Case Management program.

Offering cross-agency trainings

- To promote shared learning and understanding within its own health department, the Tazewell County Network hosts a **monthly in-service training** for health department employees to learn more about other birth to three service providers in the community. These trainings help health department staff make better referrals for families and coordinate necessary services.

- The McLean County Network joined forces with the Early Childhood Care and Education Partnership to host a **child care job fair**. The fair attracted 166 community members and college students seeking employment in the early childhood field.

- In Adams County, a **cross-systems training** on the Denver II Developmental Screening Test was offered to staff from child care, Early Intervention, social services, the health department, and the schools.

- In partnership with the community college, the Wabash County Network held a **training for child care staff**. The next training will focus on topics such as developmentally appropriate practice, behavior modification, and stress in children.

Ensuring that families have a say:
Increasing family satisfaction with the system of services for expecting families and children under three

The All Our Kids: Birth to Three Networks help assure that the local birth to three service system is grounded in family-centered practice by actively involving family members in the planning, delivery, and evaluation of services. Each network community carefully surveyed parents of very young children to capture their needs and desires as part of its initial planning process, and continues to work to involve families in a meaningful and effective manner.

Ensuring a family focus

- To strengthen the mechanism for involving family members, Stephenson County initiated a **Parent Group** that serves as a forum for parents to share ideas and contribute to the Network. To support the success of the Parent Group, the Network is partnering with its members to offer family-friendly hours and provide transportation, child care, and food to accommodate families attending the group.

- To ensure the cultural relevance of public education materials for families in the North Lawndale community in Chicago, parents participate in **focus group discussions** and give feedback on draft materials.

- To "meet parents where they are," the coordinators in McLean, Kane, Macon and Adams Counties attended **local parent groups** and solicited parental input that informed the networks' strategic plans. The Tazewell County Network used the summer months to survey parents at local swimming pools.

- Vermilion County worked with **local companies** to encourage employees to complete a parent assessment survey regarding child care needs. The survey results showed that employees need additional and varied child care options. The Network forwarded these findings to the local employers and urged them to respond to families' identified needs.

- To inform the larger community about the results of its birth to three community assessment, the town of Cicero and Stephenson County published and distributed **health status "report cards."**

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